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By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

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THERE is no privilege of which an Engliſhman is ſo jealous, nor for which he ſo highly values the conſtitution of his country, as the liberty that is allowed him, not only of thinking as he pleaſes, but of generouſly communicating his thoughts to the public. This glorious charter, limited as it is, and ought to be, by wholſome laws, has infinite advantages derived from it; particularly as it tends to cultivate the liberal arts, and helps to carry on the great work of ſcience. But whether it is always for the improvement of our taſte, any more than of our morals, that we ſhould be allowed to realiſe our ſentiments, eſpecially where the object falls immediately under the public eye, is a queſtion that may perhaps admit of a debate.

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THUS, for inſtance, if an ingenious gentleman, for the greater embelliſhment of his private library, ſhould think proper to erect the head, or even the entire figure of a ſhaking Mandarine, between the buſts of Tully and Demoſthenes; or to exalt the divinities of Pekin to the ſame degree of honour in his gallery, that he has already paid to the Grecian Venus and Apollo, it would be an infringement upon Britiſh liberty to check his devotion. But if the ſame innovating taſte ſhould intrude upon the muſes' ſhrine in our public ſeats of learning, I ſhould wiſh for ſome authority to ſtop ſo ſacrilegious an attempt.

THE ſame care ſhould extend even to our amuſements: I do not mean to debar any of them from their right of appearing as often as their patrons pleaſe to call for them; I would only aſſign them the proper limits of time and place, and prevent their bringing any confuſion upon themſelves and others. It is certainly very juſt, that Harlequin ſhould flouriſh with his dagger of lath, and invert the order of nature whenever he finds it neceſſary; but though I am delighted with the ingenuity of my party-coloured friend, it would grieve me to ſee him ſo far miſtake his talents, as to introduce himſelf very familiarly into the company of Shakeſpear and Johnſon.

To carry this obſervation a little higher, I think any one of our public entertainments, that more peculiarly belongs to the refined part of the world, ſhould be preſerved from any alloying mixture, that may ſink and debaſe it's value, or make us look upon it's ſtandard below the original worth that it pretends to claim. It is upon this account, that I cannot enough lament the preſent ſtate of our Italian opera, which ſeems to be continually declining, without any friendly hand to interpoſe, which might reſtore it to it's native purity, or preſerve it from total decay. But before this kind reformer can be met with, or if any ſuch ſhould appear,

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before his endeavours could hope for any ſucceſs, it will be proper to examine our own taſte, to find whether it will ſtand the trial, and whether we ſhould not think his care very impertinent and ill applied.

At preſent our attention ſeems to be ſo entirely fixed upon AIR, that we think nothing enhances the value of an opera ſo much, as allowing the performers to introduce their own favourite ſongs at pleaſure; and this elegant aſſortment, ſelected from drama's of oppoſite ſubjects, written by poets of irreconcileable geniuſſes, and ſet to muſic by compoſers of contrary feelings, is ſerved up to our inexpreſſible ſatisfaction, and eagerly devoured under the modiſh title of a PASTICCIO.

If I may be permitted to enter into a ſerious diſquiſition of this entertainment, after what I have ſaid of it in a former paper, I muſt beg leave to obſerve, that the Italian opera carries much more meaning in it, than one part of it's audience is poſſibly aware of, and many of the other part are willing to allow; but it is therefore neceſſary to chuſe Metaſtaſio for the poet, upon whoſe ſingle merit this ſpecies of drama muſt ſtand or fall.

And here, notwithſtanding the laudable partiality which directs us to give the palm to our own countrymen, it muſt be confeſſed that this foreigner has at leaſt as good a title to it as any Engliſh tragedian of this century; and if (like them too) he has not the advantage of ſtriking out much that is new, he has the happineſs of throwing an air of novelty upon the ſentiments which he adopts, by the agreeable dreſs he gives them, and the advantageous point of view in which they were placed.

It would be exceeding the bounds of this paper to dwell upon every peculiar excellency; but it is no more than juſtice to enter into a fair examination, and, without any invidious compariſon, to enquire whether his thoughts

are not as pure and claſſical, his language as expreſſive and poetical, his characters as diſtinctly marked, as ſtrongly ſupported, and as judiciouſly finiſhed, his conduct of the drama as well carried on, and leading as clearly to the grand cataſtrophe, as thoſe among the moſt admired of our modern writers. In the laſt circumſtance he has a difficulty in his way, which the ableſt hand would ſometimes be at a loſs to remove: as the nature of this work requires every thing to be brought to a happy concluſion, it cannot but be obſerved with how maſterly a ſtep he deviates from the true to the feigned event, without confuſion, or ſwerving from the intention of his original plan.

But it is not ſufficient to examine Metaſtaſio's pretenſions by the common rules of criticiſm; there is much more required of him than of the ordinary tragic poet; not only as he is confined to the meaſure of three acts, but even theſe muſt be conciſely managed, to avoid the drowzineſs of a weary recitative. His dialogue therefore, and even his narration, is ſhort as it is clear; a ſignificant expreſſion, ſometime a ſingle word, conveys a whole ſentiment, and that without leaving room for doubt, or throwing the leaſt obſcurity. His ſoliloquies, where the compoſer has an opportunity of introducing the accompanied recitative, perhaps the moſt noble part of an opera, are not only diſtinguiſhed by the fineſt touches of poetry, but abound in all that variety and tranſition of paſſions, which naturally work in the human mind, when it is wrought up to the height of it's diſtreſs. His ſongs and choruſſes, where all the power of muſic ought to combine, are made up of ſentiment; theſe indeed are ſo finely imagined, and finiſhed with ſo happy an elegance, that perhaps they would not ſuffer even by appearing among the antient Lyric writers.

If this be true of our poet (and ſurely it is but juſtice to allow him this) let us bring him upon the ſtage, attend-

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ed as he ought. And here it is not enough, that the compoſer be thoroughly ſkilled in all the art of muſic, and feel the whole force of it, but he muſt partake of the poet's ſpirit, catch the flame through every ſcene, and be ſo far wrapt in the genius of his author, as to preſerve the ſame caſt of ſentiment through the whole work. This indeed is ſo neceſſary an attention to his character, that a ſingle compoſer, though but of the ſecond claſs, who ſhall follow him with affection, and enter into a ſocial feeling with him as far as he is capable, will do him more juſtice, than a ſuite of the ableſt maſters at his heels, who perform their alternate ſervices, and conſider his ideas ſeparately, without having regard to the union and harmony of the whole.

But let the poet, and his attendant harmoniſt be ever ſo happily united, there is ſtill a reaſoning, but perhaps not the moſt feeling part of mankind, who will by no means allow the opera any dramatic merit, and conſequently deprive it at once of it's diſtinguiſhing worth. Their judgment, it ſeems, is irreparably hurt, in finding heroes conquering, rivals contending, lovers deſpairing to the ſound of muſic; and they cannot reconcile it to their ſenſes, that people who ſeem diſcourſing upon very intereſting ſubjects, ſhould be obliged to do it by time and meaſure. The learned among theſe will probably meet with an apology, from ſomething ſimilar upon the Grecian ſtage, and the others will do well to conſider whether they are not literal critics in muſic, as grammarians are in learning; perhaps they cannot ſeparate from harmony the idea of fiddle-ſtrings and pipes, any more than theſe can from language the invariable chime of adverb, conjunction and prepoſition; whereas the muſic we are ſpeaking of is the voice of nature, in her various accents of joy, grief, rage, lamentation, pity, or deſpair. The notes indeed are diveſted of their wildneſs, have their temperaments, cadences, and limits; but they ſeem to be no other than the laws which nature has ſet them,

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